

**Indra Overland and Mikkel Berg-Nordlie, *Bridging Divides: Ethno-Political Leadership among the Russian Sámi* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012)**

Marc Woons  
KU Leuven

Northern Europe is home to between sixty and a hundred thousand Sámi, an Indigenous people whose Arctic homeland of Sápmi overlaps with Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia. About 2,000 live within the boundaries of the Russian state (pp. 114-115). Collectively, between 1996 and 2012 Indra Overland and Mikkel Berg-Nordlie conducted primary research on this Russian Sámi population. Through interviews, reviews of newspaper articles, and prolonged stays among the people, the authors examined the role of formal Russian Sámi ethno-political organizations in promoting the revival of Sámi culture and language following the Soviet collapse. Their central claim is that the Russian Sámi's linguistic and cultural revival had to overcome two divides in particular: "between urban and rural Russian Sámi and ... between the Russian Sámi and their ethnic kin in the Nordic countries [of Norway, Sweden, and Finland]" (p. 4). Their conclusion is that the Russian Sámi overcame challenges associated with these divides to foster a "revolution" that established an ethnic civil society. "Despite teething troubles, the Russian Sámi managed to set up their own ethnic-political infrastructure and, in the subsequent years, actively attempted to shape their own future as part of the border-transcending Sámi people" (p. 5).

Bridging the Russian-Nordic divide is the Russian Sámi's primary goal. While isolated under Soviet rule, their Nordic kin formed international organizations, secured rights, and even pressured the various states to establish Sámi parliaments. As the Soviet Union collapsed, the Russian Sámi felt a "need to 'catch up' with the West...most institutions are located on the Nordic side, important symbols are of Nordic Sámi origin, and the political strategies of the Russian Sámi are often informed by the Nordic Sámi successes" (pp. 16-17). The educational reorientation section speaks most directly to bridging this divide (ch. 5). Despite some challenges establishing educational programs in Nordic countries for Russian Sámi, Nordic post-secondary institutions have played a critical role in cultivating Russian Sámi identities. This runs contrary to the witnessed assimilatory effect of Russian universities (pp. 81-83).

In other areas, the Russian-Nordic divide acts as a constant external pressure that magnifies both positively and negatively the urban-rural divide within the Russian Sámi community. For instance, reviving the Russian Sámi language, called Kildin, not only saw the Sami face damaging internal debates about what alphabet to use (p.65-71) and an unfavorable gap between urban written Kildin and rural spoken Kildin (pp.71-73), but also Nordic pressure to use the more common North Sámi

language (pp. 72, 81). The authors tell a similar story about the emergence of Sámi political organizations. Internally, the Russian Sámi experienced an urban-rural divide that saw its initial organization, the Association of Kola Sámi established in 1989, challenged on the grounds that they failed to include rural Sámi to the same extent as Nordic organizations (pp. 95; 98-99). This perceived lack of transparency and accountability fueled the creation of a second organization in 1998 called the Public Organization of the Sámi of Murmansk Province (p.100). The authors nevertheless conclude that the split has not been as detrimental as one might expect, suggesting that they now cooperate and complement one another in terms of representing diverse Sámi interests (p. 102).

The authors summarize the current state of affairs by invoking the complex relationship between the two divides: "Although [the first leaders] can perhaps be said to have had an excessive focus on foreign actors, while being less successful in establishing in-group cohesion, a positive Sámi identity still became more widespread as a result of their activities. However, the divides between rural and urban, educated sectors of the Russian Sámi community...were not overcome" (p. 107).

*Bridging Divides* is a well-written, well-structured, and most of all a well-researched book. It provides invaluable primary research on the Russian Sámi as they revive their language, culture, and identity after being separated from their much more numerous Nordic kin by the Iron Curtain. This sheds invaluable light on the internal politics of ethno-political revival that is otherwise overlooked in many studies of the Russian-Nordic divide. The only criticism in this regard is the significant space given to explaining Sámi diversity and history. Almost half of the book is spent ensuring the reader is fully informed on these matters. Though the book contains few surprises for those familiar with Indigenous politics in today's world, the descriptive power of the two divides provides a convincing account of where the Russian Sámi are today in terms of 'catching up' with their Nordic kin. It is also refreshing to see that they do not shy away from difficult subjects that highlight problematic relations within the Russian Sámi community and with their Nordic kin, tactfully describing challenges associated with external foreign aid and internal elitism. The book is therefore valuable to anyone interested in the internal and external challenges that come with Indigenous political revitalization. Its greatest appeal is left for those interested in maintaining Indigenous diversity – linguistic or otherwise – within small communities in a rapidly globalizing world.

Two fundamental aspects are nevertheless underemphasized. Early on, the Nordic Sámi gains are seen as a positive example of asserting Indigenous self-determination. This leads the Russian Sámi to support 'pan-Sámism' – full cooperation between all Sámi to achieve a unified political community (p. 14). But it is unclear that all of the hurdles to its achievement are considered. More

specifically, it is assumed that the Nordic Sámi model is both desirable and plausible for the Russian Sámi. This requires greater consideration of whether the Nordic Sámi model actually provides them with self-determination. It also requires an explanation of how the Russian Sámi, given the strong differences that still exist between East and West, can emulate the Nordic model. After all, Russia's general relationship with Indigenous peoples is much different and perhaps more complicated than those in the three Nordic countries. The authors provide a brief answer to this question when they state that the Sámi are an even smaller minority within pan-Russian Indigenous organizations and "therefore have more difficulty in getting heard and represented ... than they do within the pan-Sámi movement" (p. 27). It nevertheless seems that, to this day, the Russian state's influence is not something that should be underestimated.

This relates to the second concern. There is almost no mention of the divide between Sámi and non-Sámi in Contemporary Russia. This is a surprising and glaring oversight, especially considering the significant attention given to how the Russian state historically separated Sámi from their lands and generally had a negative socio-economic impact on their communities (pp. 39-56). Moreover, the Indigenous-state relationship is the most commonly considered divide in most case studies of this kind. This divide is arguably much stronger and makes it extremely difficult to close the Russian-Nordic divide. This is not to deny the important influence of the Nordic Sámi in reviving language, culture, and identity. However, the larger (and less discussed) goal of self-determination requires significant changes in the Sámi-Russian relationship. It seems unlikely that Nordic pressure will be enough to help the Russian Sámi, particularly considering the Nordic Sámi themselves struggle with achieving self-determination. Yet, this is what the authors seem to suggest. "The dominant discourse is that the Russian Sámi need Nordic Sámi assistance to help them resist the pressure from Russian society and authorities" (p. 89). My main point is not to suggest such pressure does not help. I, nevertheless, remain skeptical that we should adopt such a narrow view.

**Milan W. Svolik, *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012)**

Henry Thomson  
Universitz of Minnesota

The past fifteen years have seen considerable growth in scholarship on politics under authoritarian regimes as political scientists have sought to understand the development of authoritarianism after the "third wave" of democratization.<sup>1</sup> Events

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1 Samuel L. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth*